

Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

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FM AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5267

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MANILA

AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON

C O N F I D E N T I A L KUALA LUMPUR 6690

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, PINT, MY

SUBJECT: TRAVELS OF MALAYSIAN DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

RERF: KUALA LUMPUR 6376

1. AMONG THE MANY RUMORS MAKING THE ROUNDS HERE IS A REPORT THAT DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER DR. MAHATHIR MOHAMED (ONE OF THREE UMNO VICE PRESIDENTS) HAD A CONFRONTATION WITH PRIME MINISTER DATUK HUSSEIN ONN (ACTING UMNO PRESIDENT) OVER THE RESIGNATIONS AND SUBSEQUENT ARRESTS OF TWO UMNO DEPUTY MINISTERS NOV 3 (REFTEL). MAHATHIR SUPPOSEDLY LEFT THE MEETING IN A HUFF AND FLEW TO LONDON IN ORDER TO DISASSOCIATE HIMSELF FROM THE GOM ACTION.

2. WE HAVE NOT RPT NOT BEEN ABLE TO SUBSTANTIATE SUCH A CLASH BWTWEEN HUSSEIN AND MAHATHIR, ALTHOUGH WE HAVE DETERMINED FROM RELIABLE SOURCES THAT MAHATHIR DID LEAVE FOR LODDON ON NOV 7 AND IS EXPECTED TO RETURN BY DEC 7. THE OSTENSIBBLE -- AND WE BELIEVE PLAUSIBLE -- REASON FOR HIS TRAVEL IS TO TAKE HIS 30 DAYS OF ANNUAL LEAVE AND VISIT HIS CHILDREN WHO ARE STUDYING IN THE UK. THE LACK OF PUBLICITY MAY STEM FROM
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SECURITY CONCERNS AS WELL AS THE PRIVATE NATURE OF THE TRIP.

3. COMMENT: THIS TOWN IS RIFE WITH RUMORS ARISING FROM TURMOIL WITH THE PRE-EMINENT UMNO PARTY OVER ALLEGATIONS IT HAS BEEN INFILTRATED BY COMMUNISTS AND PRO-COMMUNISTS. THERE MAY, HOWEVER, BE A FACTUAL BASIS TO SOME OF THESE REPORTS; FOR INSTANCE DR. MAHATHIR IS ON PUBLIC RECORD AS URGING A CONSERVATIVE APPROACH IN MOVING AGAINST THOSE ALLEGED TO BE COMMUNISTS OR PRO-COMMUNISTS IN THE GOVERNMENT AND UMNO AND CITING THE DISTINCTION HE SEES BETWEEN "PEACEFUL" SOCIALISM AND "VIOLENT" COMMUNISM. PRESUMABLY HE HAS PRESSED THESE VIEWS IN INTERNAL DEBATES OVER HOW TO DEAL WITH THOSE NOW OR FORMERLY CLOSE TO THE CENTERS OF POWER ALLEGEDLY IMPLICATED BY SELF CONFESSED COMMUNIST JOURNALIST SAMAD ISMAIL. ON THE WHOLE, HOWEVER, MOST OF THESE RUMORS SEEM TO HAVE LITTLE FACTUAL FOUNDATION, AND SIMPLY REFLECT THE PRESENT HYPERSENSITIZED ATMOSPHERE WHICH GENERATES WILD SPECULATION, OFTEN FUELED BY DISINFORMATION DISSEMINATED BY THE VARYING INTERESTED PARTIES JOCKEYING FOR POWER OR SELF-PRESERVATION. ANOTHER IMPORTANT FACTOR IS THAT DATUK HUSSEIN ONN KEEPS HIS OWN COUNSEL AND DOES NOT APPEAR TO DIVULGE HIS INNER THOUGHTS TO ANYONE, THEREBY CREATING AN INFORMATION VACUUM READILY FILLED BY RUMOR AND SPECULATION. (SOME MAY RECALL THAT A YEAR AGO IT WAS STRONGLY RUMORED THAT HUSSEIN, THEN DEPUTY PM, WAS ABOUT TO SUBMIT HIS RESIGNATION OUT OF CONCERN FOR HIS HEALTH AND/OR HIS DISILLUSIONMENT WITH EXTENSIVE CORRUPTION IN UPPER ECHELONS OF THE GOM. THESE RUMORS ALTHOUGH NOT RPT NOT IMPLAUSIBLE HAVE NEVER BEEN SUBSTANTIATED AND WE SUSPECT THEY WERE INITIATED BY PARTISANS OF TENGKU RAZALEIGH WITH AN EYE TO HAVING HUSSEIN STEP DOWN IN FAVOR OF THE LATTER.) UNDERHILL

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